

Developing the National System of Marine Protected Areas: Highlights



Why Does the Nation Need a National System of MPAs?

For decades, government agencies in the United States have been establishing marine protected areas (MPAs) to conserve critical natural and cultural marine resources. In fact, the National Park Service, the Fish and Wildlife Service, NOAA, and many states have their own systems of MPAs. While there is some coordination among sites, there is no overarching mechanism to help coordinate effective ecosystem management across these agencies and programs. In particular, we do not yet fully understand:

- what marine resources the nation protects;
- how well these resources are protected; and
- what, if any, further management may be required to make them more effective.

The National Marine Protected Areas Center is working to analyze and understand the nation's MPAs. In cooperation with government and non-government partners across the country, the MPA Center is developing a national MPA system that will include many of the MPA sites and networks that already exist, as well as identifying gaps where additional protection may be needed. The MPA Center has reached out to stakeholders who both support and oppose MPAs and has successfully built consensus on the values and uses of a national system.

Framework for Developing the National System of MPAs

Our nation's guide for collaboratively building an efficient and effective national system of marine protected area is now being revised based on extensive public comment, and will be finalized in 2008. It:

- Defines an effective national system built in partnership with federal, state/territorial, and tribal partners and in consultation with non-government stakeholders;
- Describes goals and objectives based on scientific information, agency cooperation, and meaningful stakeholder input;
- Outlines processes to develop the initial national system, based on existing sites;
- Explains how to enhance MPA stewardship and coordination, identify national system gaps, and identify future conservation priorities; and
- Explains a process for monitoring and evaluating MPA programs.

Benefits of an Effective National System of MPAs

- Enhances protection of our marine resources
- Encourages government agency cooperation to address issues beyond the scope of individual MPAs or programs
- Contributes to economic health through potential opportunities for tourism and recreation
- Improves public access to scientific information and decision-making about the nation's marine resources

Key Steps in 2008

- Complete the final national system Framework
- Identify existing sites meeting near-term objectives of the national system
- Work with partners to launch the system with an initial group of sites
- Continue developing innovative tools and information for regional analysis and coordination

For More Information

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